DFID Department for
International
Development

UK**aid**
from the Department for
Internati   l Development

Electoral Assistance and Politics:
Lessons for International Support

Electoral Assistance and Politics:

Lessons for International Support

Contents

Executive Summary

Elections are increasingly accepted as a key component of establishing and maintaining state legitimacy, an important step on the path to forging an inclusive and stable political settlement. Moreover, elections have become a feature of states along a fairly wide political spectrum, from established democracies to transitional democracies and semi-authoritarian forms of democratic governance, from very fragile to more effective contexts.

However, poorly conducted elections – for example, those that are carried out prematurely, those without adequate inclusion, or without transparent procedures – can easily exacerbate violence. Delivering free, fair and credible elections is therefore a considerable but important challenge, logistically, financially, and politically.

The international community has an important role to play in supporting the successful planning, delivery and embedding of elections within a wider context of support to political systems and deepening democracy. Development partners can provide financial, political, technical and diplomatic assistance as part of these efforts, directing support strategically to a wide range of stakeholders and over a long period of time – the 'electoral cycle approach'.

However, a range of evidence suggests that international support to elections often falls short of the desired standard. Whilst significant progress has been made towards a more nuanced, harmonised and politically-informed approach to elections by the international community, a number of obstacles continue to impede more effective international support to elections. These include: a failure to analyse the wider political context within which elections occur; weak electoral risk analysis, such as understanding when the best moment may be to hold elections; incoherencies within the diplomatic and developmental policies of the international community; unrealistic expectations regarding the potential impact of the international community's role; inadequate attention to election observation; lack of a long-term and broad approach to strengthening women's political participation; and poor commitment to the principles of harmonisation, alignment and ownership.

This paper draws on a number of reviews and case studies of elections in the last four years to draw out key lessons, in the form of 'principles for election support'. It calls for greater international efforts to address the challenges and failures that currently reduce the effectiveness of international support to this critical area of democratic development.

The international community has an important role to play in supporting the successful planning, delivery and embedding of elections within a wider context of support to political systems and deepening democracy. Development partners can provide financial, political, technical and diplomatic assistance as part of these efforts, directing support strategically to a wide range of stakeholders and over a long period of time – the 'electoral cycle approach'.

Introduction

Today, citizens and political leaders in developing countries commonly see elections as a crucial step in the process of governments attaining internal and international political legitimacy. In peaceful, established democracies, elections represent a crucial opportunity for citizens to select and to hold to account those that seek to govern. At the other end of the spectrum, in countries emerging from conflict, well-timed elections can contribute to conflict resolution and help to consolidate a peace agreement or power-sharing 'deal' between elites. As such, they can constitute a crucial step along the path to forging a stable and inclusive political settlement, provided that elites have first come to an agreement that they are ready to work together within a political system[1]. Although elections alone do not equate with democracy, democracy cannot be achieved without them either.

Moreover, there are compelling reasons for the international community to provide electoral support in partner countries, despite the complexity, sensitivity and challenges that this presents. Although elections are very much a domestic affair, there is evidence that international support can make a difference, especially in post-conflict and fragile states[2]. Their role goes beyond provision of financial and technical support, to include international credibility and serving as a guarantor in the aftermath of elections regarding electoral outcomes. A further incentive for many donor agencies such as DFID is the understanding that democratic politics and political rights are a critical component in the fulfilment of poverty reduction in the broadest sense[3].

A broad look at the state of democracy around the world reveals that although the condition of democracy is certainly troubled in many places, the number and proportion of regimes that are democracies has stayed more or less the same in the last 10 years[4]. Many of the countries where democracy has only emerged relatively recently are characterized by deep societal divisions: elections are giving citizens a real say in who their leaders are and the opportunity to apportion power peacefully.

Nevertheless, the hope that an increase in the number of countries holding elections and adopting democratic institutions might lead to a democratic transition across the world has been short-lived. Democracy has not fulfilled many of the expectations that citizens harboured and some authoritarian regimes have become more secure and confident, increasingly adept at imitating forms of democracy while

---

[1] See for example The UN Role in Promoting Democracy: Between Ideals and Reality Edited by: Edward Newman and Roland Rich. UN University Press.

[2] Wilson and Sharma 2008

[3] Several statistical studies have found that, while controlling for a wide variety of other factors, higher levels of democratic assistance are on average associated with movement from lower to higher levels of democracy, as measured by some of the most general indices of democratic government (Al-Momani 2003; Finkel et al 2007, 2008; Kalyvitis and Vlachaki 2007; Azpuru et al 2008). These effects are robust and statistically significant, providing the clearest evidence to date that democracy assistance generally meets its desired goals.

[4] Diamond 2008.

undermining its substance. Events in Kenya in 2007 and Zimbabwe in 2008 have underlined that elections can be intensely violent. The Afrobarometer shows that although the majority of African people still support democracy as the best form of political regime, the proportion in favour has decreased over the last ten years. In some contexts, democratic elections have failed to deliver increased stability and development, and in some instances international assistance has even provoked a backlash against Western governments and organisations believed to be trying to control electoral outcomes.

Supporting democracy in fragile and conflict-affected countries is especially challenging. The OECD DAC Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States highlight the critical importance of the maxim to Do No Harm in any development intervention. But it is not always clear how to follow this rule within the complexity of electoral support – for example, when and how the international community should support elections in a peace building process. Amongst the international community, there is growing recognition of these challenges and trends, and of the fact that international support to elections falls short of desirable impact and coherency.

Today, citizens and political leaders in developing countries commonly see elections as a crucial step in the process of governments attaining internal and international political legitimacy.

Background

In 2008-2009, UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) commissioned a series of studies[5] to increase understanding of elections as political processes, and to improve practice in electoral support, taking account of recent election experiences. A study on the importance of elections[6] was complemented by a review of UK election support[7] and a series of country case studies, reviewing elections and electoral support over a 10 year period were undertaken.

Case study countries were selected according to where elections had recently been held and where the UK had played an active role in election support. (In some cases these were post conflict situations) These were Kenya; the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); Nigeria; Sierra Leone; Bangladesh; Pakistan; and Nepal. (Summaries can be found in the attached pack). Emphasis was placed on understanding why and what triggers electoral violence, the problems of incumbency and so-called 'stolen' elections, how best to support post-conflict elections, and how to ensure that electoral support is grounded in political realism, while effectively combining technical, developmental and diplomatic support.

This brief highlights some of the critical lessons learnt. It is intended to complement existing specialist knowledge and research generated by organisations such as International IDEA (the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in Sweden); IFES (the International Foundation for Electoral Systems); the EC; UNDP; and others, and bring a more political perspective to a highly technical subject. It takes the Electoral Cycle approach[8] as a given –there is no doubt that attention needs to be placed on all aspects of the election process. The issues covered in this paper range from the systems and institutions involved in managing elections (including those supported by the international community); to the independence of domestic and international observer groups; to the wider range of political actors and institutions which participate in elections, placing them in their wider political context.

The paper presents the lessons learnt from the various pieces of work according to nine strategic principles to guide policy-makers when providing elections support. These principles stem from the recognition that successful international support for elections and democratisation more generally must go beyond technical approaches to encompass political analysis and political solutions. We recognise that international support in this arena is an inherently political act and inevitably has an impact on local politics.

---

[5] Considerable portions of text are directly copied from various reviews commissioned by DFID. These are listed in full at the end of this paper.

[6] Carothers (2008)

[7] Wilson et al (2008)

[8] This approach aims to align electoral assistance with all stages of the electoral process from planning and registration in the pre-electoral period through campaigning and voting in the electoral period to reviewing, reforming and developing in the post-election period. The electoral cycle approach also aims to direct aid as necessary to all the actors, whose effective participation in elections is essential for a democratic outcome, and that is likely to include political parties, the media and civil society, as well as state institutions.

> i. **Understand the wider context within which elections occur**
>
> ii. **Be clear when to advocate for and support elections – and when to hold back**
>
> iii. **Analyse electoral risk at all stages**
>
> iv. **Integrate diplomatic, financial and technical approaches to elections support**
>
> v. **Systematically adopt the electoral cycle approach**
>
> vi. **Recognise limitations of development partners' role in elections support**
>
> vii. **Support election observation**
>
> viii. **Support women's political participation**
>
> ix. **Follow principles of harmonisation, alignment and ownership**

(i) Understand the wider context within which elections occur

Understanding the context within which elections are held is key. Some elections are pivotal moments in a country's history. The Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh elections in 2008, Kenya and Sierra Leone in 2007, and DRC in 2006 illustrate the importance of particular national elections for different reasons, and the case studies demonstrate how the international community responded to each challenge. But between these moments, as the case studies also illustrate, other elections were held which did not attract the same levels of attention – either domestically or internationally. On the international side, there was a commensurate reduced level of logistical and political support for elections to be held at the local level. The question for consideration is whether they should have received greater attention. Evidence from the case studies suggests that, for the democratic process to take root in any country, the international community needs to give far more consistent attention to each and every election, assessing both the technical capacity of the country to hold it, and the political meaning behind it.

Beyond this, it is also important to analyse the significance of different types of elections – national versus local, presidential versus parliamentary – and to distinguish between elections held in 'hybrid' democracies[9] and in more overtly 'democratic' states[10]. Distinguishing between immediate post-conflict or post-authoritarian elections, second or third elections and elections in more established democracies is also fundamental to tailoring the right kind of support. In each case, elections play a different role. The case studies highlight the fact that the international community tends to emphasise national elections but often overlooks local elections (e.g. local Upazila elections in Bangladesh in 2009), even though the local elections are often the crucial arena for deepening democracy, building grass-roots political engagement and encouraging social and economic development. This is especially relevant in geographically large and populous countries that use a centralised system of governance.

---

[9] Hybrid democracies refer to those democracies in transition that have not succeeded in establishing consolidated or functioning democratic regimes, but rather, have often resorted to semi-authoritarian forms of rule. See "Hybrid Regimes And The Challenges Of Deepening And Sustaining Democracy In Developing Countries" Background note prepared for the Wilton Park Conference on Democracy and Development, 10-12 Oct 2007. A. Rocha Menocal, V. Fritz, and L. Rakner.

[10] Definitions and country ratings vary, but democracy indicators such as those provided by the National Democratic Institute provide a helpful measure.

These examples underline the need to understand first what the contest is about, and second, what the political challenges are likely to be. For example, do parliamentary elections really matter if the President retains all real power? How important are by-elections or local elections for developing democracy in any one context? How does this affect development success (or not)? What is the role of the political parties? Is voter loyalty divided on grounds of ideology, ethnicity, kinship, religion, geography or grievances of any kind? What procedures are in place nationally to guarantee free and fair elections? This latter question touches upon issues such as the independence of the judiciary and electoral commission; the money available for electoral equipment; security surrounding electoral processes and access to polling stations; democratic traditions; checks and balances in the system etc. Finally, an understanding of the technical procedures and design of the system is also critical – whether the country uses a 'first past the post' system or proportional representation; or whether there are quota systems to guarantee places for women and minorities in elected assemblies.

Undertaking robust political analysis helps the international community to identify what needs to be done and why, and to walk the fine line between supporting a democratic agenda and potentially legitimising a flawed electoral processes.
The political landscapes in which international development partners[11] operate are often tremendously complex. Inevitably, trade offs and choices will have to be made between supporting second-best processes or supporting nothing at all. A good example of this is donor support to local elections in Pakistan, as Box 1 illustrates.

Box 1:	**Pakistan local elections in 2001: an opportunity or threat to democracy?**

When Pervez Musharraf seized political power through a military coup in 1999, he suspended democracy but also decided to hold non-partisan local government elections in 2001. The international community took the opportunity to support these elections, and actively promoted gender equality and the political inclusion of the disenfranchised. Thousands of women candidates, for example, received training in how to be a councillor. This was consistent with the development partners' emphasis on poverty reduction and creating spaces for the most vulnerable to voice their needs. However, since this election was designed to keep the reins of power firmly in the hands of the military and bureaucratic elite through a quasi-populist agenda, the international community was simultaneously endorsing an electoral process introduced to broaden support for Musharraf's regime.

(Taken from elections case study by Waseem et al 2008)

---

[11] In this paper, 'development partners' (or DPs) is used to refer to the various different ministries of donor countries that make up the international community. In the context of elections, this tends to be embassies and development agencies, but may also include ministries of defence etc.

(ii) Be clear when to advocate for and support elections – and when to hold back

Post-conflict elections must not be rushed. The international community has at times pushed for elections to take place quite speedily in countries coming out of conflict in order to legitimise the new government. But this has on occasion been premature. If rushed, elections risk undermining fragile, nascent states and contributing to more conflict. Bosnia is commonly cited as a case of premature post-conflict elections (1996) which helped to kick-start the façade of democratic politics but also helped nationalist parties cement an early grip on political power.

> Elections in post-conflict settings should be seen more as a validation or ratification of a political settlement achieved by hard, often conflictive negotiations than as the central mechanism for establishing a political settlement

Well conducted elections can contribute to conflict resolution in a country; poorly conducted ones can as easily exacerbate violence. In a number of circumstances well-managed elections have advanced the cause of domestic peace after prolonged periods of civil war (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000). This was the case in both Nepal and Sierra Leone. This is not to say that progress towards peace was automatic (indeed, in both cases the risks of an escalation were very high); very real dangers remain after elections, and there are many steps still to be taken to consolidate any gains made through the electoral process.

An iterative process toward elections coupled with support for state-building activities start a state along a virtuous path of becoming capable, accountable and responsive. Accountability is more likely to develop under a democratic regime, and although it is difficult to develop the rule of law and state capacity under a budding democracy, it is more probable than in an autocracy[12]. Thus, the argument for gradualism – pursuing state-building and democratisation simultaneously in small increments – is powerful. Of course, it is national political stakeholders, rather than the international community, that decide if and when elections will take place, but the latter can use their influence to advocate for an incremental approach.

[12] Carothers 2007

Box 2:	The Sequencing Dilemma: Have elections helped to bring peace in DRC?

The DRC case study gives a cautiously positive answer to this question, even if the effect is only partial. First, most of the contending military forces in the Congo have withdrawn, laid down their arms or at least suspended fighting as a result of the political settlement that recognised the election process as the cornerstone of national democratisation. Nonetheless, some remain in the field and post-election peace was ultimately maintained though armed deterrence. Second, the 'discourse' has shifted. Groups that used to see legitimate power as extending from the barrel of a gun now have to hide the gun behind a rhetorical screen of popular will or need. Third, electoral competition has weeded out some of the military combatants.

Were elections a premature solution demonstrating a naïve international belief in their power? The return of General Laurent Nkunda's Tutsi forces to the battlefield (Oct 2008) was certainly a setback for the DRC. To blame this on the elections, however, is historical. To the contrary, the elections strengthened, not weakened, the hand of the DRC Government in dealing with Nkunda; it presents a much more unified political front and enjoys much greater international legitimacy as a result. Moreover, the eastern Congo civil war can only be tackled by concerted and unified international action, something the 2006 elections have made more likely – although, disappointingly, neither the DRC Government nor the international community have yet been able to secure peace in this region.

(Taken from elections case study by Kadima and Leonard 2009)

Box 3:	Nepal's delayed elections taking the time to get it right

A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed between the government of Nepal and Maoist rebels in November 2006, and provided for elections a mere seven months later, in June 2007. This tight timeline threatened the integrity of the elections by not allowing time for meaningful consultation, development of an electoral framework, strengthening the Elections Commission, comprehensive voter registration, formation of new political parties and progress in public security, amongst other things.

The two postponements subsequently agreed between the coalition government and Maoists ultimately mitigated most of these risks and their potential consequences for the peace process, although agreements with particular ethnic groups (the Madhesis and Janajatis) were achieved only at the last minute and in response to outbreaks of violence following perceived failures to address their grievances.

Although the international community was keen to see the electoral timeline respected, as a guarantee that the peace process was on track, clearly the risks of holding an election before the various critical issues had been adequately incorporated into the process would have been detrimental to a successful outcome. As a result of the many reforms and efforts to ensure efforts on inclusiveness took place during the ten month delay, Election Day itself was peaceful, and the results were formally accepted by all parties. However, at the time of writing, the peace process remains on a knife-edge as the crucial issue of army integration remains unresolved.

(Taken from elections case study by Owen et al 2008)

In post-conflict societies in particular, which face a high degree of divisiveness, it is also crucial that the elections are carried out in such a way as to minimize contention. Kumar and Ottaway (1998) identify three strategies to mitigate the divisive effects of post-conflict elections, which DPs can support through a range of strategies:

1) Holding constant discussions, consultations, and negotiations among representatives of the rival parties during the planning and conduct of elections to promote a better understanding and appreciation of the opponent's perspective.

2) Developing and enforcing a comprehensive code of electoral conduct.

3) Carrying out extensive civic and voter education programs to ensure wide public understanding of and participation in the elections.

The international community has a particularly important role in fragile contexts as players who are willing to (a) guarantee the relative integrity of electoral processes and (b) continue to ensure that the bargains struck in the run-up to elections are honoured later. This helps ensure that all parties participating in the election feel that they had a fair prospect of gain. Box 4 below highlights the way in which the international community's role after elections is critical.

Box 4:   In the aftermath of elections: the international community's role in Kenya 2007

The Kenya case study illustrates how the international community, although unable to prevent the slide into violence following the 2007 Kenyan elections, supported a panel of eminent African personalities (led by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan) to mediate and find a solution. This led to a power sharing arrangement between the two political parties in conflict. Amongst the various elements of the agreement, one key role is ascribed to the international community – an independent internationally-composed review commission to investigate all aspects of the 2007 general elections and recommend areas for electoral reform.

(Taken from elections case study by Leonard and Odhiambo 2009)
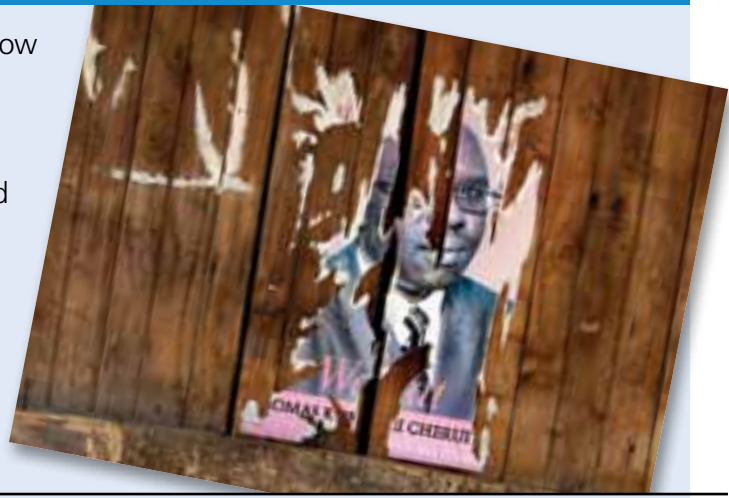
(iii) Analyse electoral risk at all stages

In some contexts, elections pose a potential risk of serving as a trigger or catalyst for violence. In any contest for power there are inevitably groups who stand to lose out. Thus there is a need to understand options for leaders that stand to lose elections in order to inform risk mitigation strategies. Moreover, politics plays out not only through recent events, but through deeper, enduring political realities and historical processes that may be less immediately visible to external observers, particularly those newly-arrived (this is a major weakness of international peacekeeping missions in post-conflict settings). As a cornerstone of its efforts to analyse risk, it is important that the international community makes every effort to understand these dynamics and the nature of a country's politics, and in particular to understand its informal politics (what is really going on behind the scenes).

Elections risks manifest in a variety of ways.
Although in worst case scenarios, violent conflict and coups may occur, more common risks are vote stealing, rigging and / or voter intimidation. Getting well-

Greater sharing between donors and across government departments of political economy analysis studies, focused on longer-term trends would help to ensure that the basis on which decisions are made is sensitive to political realities, and identify real opportunities for change.

functioning institutions in place to combat this is critical to a successful overall outcome. As Box 5 shows, independent and capable elections commissions are central to this effort. The competent and impartial conduct of an election is fundamental to its success. Elections are immensely challenging logistically and none of the case study countries handled them perfectly.

Box 5:   Analysing Electoral Commissions as a source of risk

Elections create great incentives to cheat and there is substantial political pressure on the electoral commission to tilt in favour of those in power. Performance by these Electoral Commissions or Management Bodies (EMBs) is very variable. International assistance and unusually high levels of integrity on the part of the election management group chairs were critical to satisfactory performance in the DRC and Sierra Leone. In Kenya, an EMB chair of past integrity resisted international assistance, and cheating at the polls overwhelmed the system. In Nigeria, the EMB has been widely condemned for complicity in the dishonesty and logistical failures that were evident on election day.

Attention to both political and technical weaknesses of Electoral Commissions is also critical. In Pakistan, for example, the main constraint on the effectiveness of the Electoral Commission (ECP) is its lack of independence from the executive. In designing their election support however, the international community has typically addressed the problems of ECP's competence and transparency, rather than its independence and non-partisan character. They have thus focused on procedural rather than substantive issues. In Kenya, development partners over-estimated the ability of respected commissioners to organise a complex process and to stand-up to intense pressures in a very high stakes election.

Understanding the different stages of the electoral cycle in which violence can occur can help ensure that efforts to mitigate risk cover the right bases. Violence can occur in the pre-electoral period, most commonly during the electoral campaign, between contending parties or between the ruling forces and opposition parties; on election day, either party versus party or state versus opposition; or following elections, initiated by disgruntled opposition forces or when the state cracks down on peaceful protests by disgruntled opposition forces. Work by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) suggests that the main flashpoints for violence tend to be around candidate nominations, party rallies and after the announcement of results.

Development partners can mitigate risk by identifying and analysing the set of risk factors that can trigger violence. Preventive diplomacy is best. The fact that the international community is still regularly surprised by outbreaks of elections-related conflict and violence indicates that more attention needs to be paid to identifying warning signs, and acting upon them when they are present. Such cases of sudden and relatively

unexpected post-electoral conflict (sometimes resulting in violence, sometimes not) appear to arise when a common set of factors are present – these are listed in Box 6 below.

Box 6:	**Risk factors for electoral violence**

- The country is one where elections have been held on a regular basis but the ruling party has been in power for some time and appears to be somewhat entrenched
- The democratic system is new and not well embedded);
- The results of the election are (expected to be) very close;
- The opposition accumulates distrust during the electoral process and comes to believe, whether based on fact or not, that the ruling powers have manipulated the results of the election in their own favour;
- The electoral system creates a 'winner-takes-all' contest;
- There is no precedent for a peaceful switch from ruling party to opposition;
- Many of the disappointed voters have a low level of education;
- The ruling power is taking measures to constrain or manipulate the results;
- The institutional framework for managing the elections lacks political independence and technical credibility.
- Population is polarised and harbours historical grievances

(Carothers 2008; Anderson et al 2005).

In-depth risk analysis can help the international community identify what is actually at stake in any particular election, and avoid making assumptions based on previous peaceful elections. In Kenya for instance, a change of regime in 2002 and government acceptance of the referendum results in 2005 led people to have great confidence in Kenyan electoral processes, and to underestimate some of the deficiencies noted. However, the stakes in both 2002 and 2005 were not as high (the status quo was maintained and there was no dramatic shift in ethnic representation) as those in the 2007 election, so deficiencies in the process held less significance. In 2007, when the contesting candidates came from different ethnic groups, the stakes were considerably higher and the deficiencies proved fatal.

Although risk analysis is crucial for informing effective donor support, experience shows us that developing effective risk mitigation strategies is always challenging. Competing foreign policy concerns; entrenched patron-client relationships; unresponsive governments; corruption and many other factors all constitute fundamental impediments to realising risk mitigation. The case studies in Boxes 6 and 7 below capture this challenge.

Box 7: **Nigeria: predicting electoral failure**

Well in advance of the 2007 elections in Nigeria, the international community identified multiple risks. The largest concern was that President Obasanjo would succeed in his bid to change the constitution of the Federation to permit him a third term in office. This danger was narrowly averted when the necessary vote in National Assembly fell short. The second most important risk identified was that the credibility of the process would be damaged by the exclusion of the candidacy of the sitting Vice President. Supreme Court ordered that his name be added to the ballot in a last minute decision. And the third major risk was the freedom and fairness of the election itself, expected to be compromised based on the pattern already established in 1999 and 2003.

Scenario planning was used to predict these election risks and the ways of dealing with them. The knowledge gained by the international community from project partners (such as the conflict tracking by international South African NGO IDASA and reports from the National Democratic Institute long-term election observers) fed into this process well. Extensive consultations also took place between DPs. Based on their risk analysis, on the one hand, DPs used their influence to help avert the two most serious threats. Moreover, international and local election observation seems generally to have resulted in concentrating the irregularities at a few polling stations and the tallying centres.

However, looking at the bigger picture, most observers conclude that elections in Nigeria were stolen. Widespread vote rigging across the country, entrenched rent-seeking and clientelistic practices, intimidation by armed youth gangs, and other such practices all undermined the integrity of the electoral process. The international community recognises that their leverage in Nigeria is quite limited. The country is not aid dependent in any way, and leverage is further weakened by the fact that many of the donor governments are consumers of Nigerian oil. The combination of strong elite commitment to the basic flaws in Nigerian 'democracy' and low international leverage means that it is quite unrealistic to expect fundamental changes in the incentives driving the way elections are determined, until oil revenues are drastically reduced, forcing a renegotiation of the elite bargain.

(Taken from elections case study by Egwu et al 2008)

Box 8:	Kenya's violent elections

The European Commission foresaw that the election would be difficult and expected there would be violence in the central Rift Valley. As a result, EC representatives in Kenya put in a strong, early bid for a European Union observer mission, hoping that a strong international presence would be all that was necessary to keep the election reasonably fair.

Very close to the election there were signals that the most likely strategy for illegitimately keeping Opposition candidate Odinga from the presidency would be fraudulently denying him a victory in his Nairobi parliamentary seat (as only an MP can become president in Kenya). Thus the UK High Commissioner and the US Ambassador personally observed the elections in Odinga's Langata constituency. However, the international community in Kenya was unable to implement adequate preventive measures – early danger signals about the performance of the Electoral Commission were not well-communicated within the donor group and therefore neither it nor the diplomats were mobilised into major precautionary activity. No early warning system was set up, despite the strong risk analysis. At the same time, DFID staff report that proposed options to train the police to impartially keep the peace on election day or to support district peace committees were rejected by the encumbent authorities, further restricting the international community's scope for reducing risk.

The case study highlights multiple stumbling blocks that may have contributed to the international community's failure to avert the crisis: a certain lack of flexibility – a structure whereby DPs were unable to make decisions in the field about how to respond rapidly; failure to anticipate the scale and nature of the violence; a lack of donor leadership; and constraints beyond the control of the DPs – such as the government's reluctance to cooperate.

(Taken from elections case study by Leonard and Odhiambo Owuor 2009)

The case studies recommend developing and applying a set of indicators for the potential for violence and stolen elections. These indicators would help determine whether a more thorough conflict analysis is required, or if preventative action should be promoted. It would help increase confidence in the likelihood of predicting violence around elections. The bullet points listed in Box 6 above would constitute helpful indicators for such a list.

When the stakes are high, 'back-stopping' by having duplicating and overlapping responsibilities between donors can be a helpful way to reduce risk.

(iv) Integrate diplomatic with financial and technical support

There is an important inter-relationship between diplomatic/political, financial and technical support before, during and after elections. The key is to get the balance right, to time it well, and to ensure that all parties work closely together to maximise the returns on their effort.

The international community needs to pay careful attention to the messages that it sends when it designs its support, and response to, elections. The inconsistency of international responses hurts their credibility, and diplomatic inconsistency about elections bleeds back into elections assistance, making it harder for DPs to argue that their support is rooted in a neutral, standards-based framework. This is difficult when DPs themselves face political changes at home due to their own political systems. Some kind of international agreement to safeguard electoral support financing might be helpful.

Support must, where possible, be consistent and long-term, and adopt uniform diplomatic and development standards to avoid accusations of bias. The Pakistan example in Box 9 below shows how the international community has not only sent out contradictory messages, but also created a degree of mistrust among ordinary people about their role and intentions. There are no easy answers to this fundamental challenge: where electoral processes are flawed, the international community needs to make a judgement about when and how to provide support and when to hold back.

Box 9:	Competing incentives and complex contexts: understanding donor approaches in Pakistan

Over the past 10 years, the international community has offered essential technical support to improve systemic weaknesses within the electoral system, including in the Electoral Commission, but this support was not sufficient to reform the system overall. This meant that although support to the January 2008 elections was generally well coordinated and technically comprehensive, it did not deal systematically with the key factors which underpin the potential for democratic politics in Pakistan. The political and institutional realities – such as the relationship between the judiciary and the executive – were not tackled.

The explanation for this approach is multi-faceted. It lies in part in an overly strong focus on technocratic solutions to addressing political issues and donor emphasis on achievement of the MDGs; in part in a belief that a sustained period of stability overseen by a benign military presidency was an essential first step before an effective democratic system could emerge; in part with donor ambivalence about what role they could play, or indeed what legitimacy they enjoyed, to support democratic institutions and processes in a sovereign state; and in part with Pakistan's geo-political position bordering Afghanistan, and particularly since 2001, on the front-line in the War on Terror.

(Taken from elections case study by Waseem et al 2008)

(v) Systematically adopt the electoral cycle approach

Focused support around election time is necessary but not sufficient to deepen accountability systems or strengthen democratic processes. Experience shows that those who support elections in conflict situations must not treat them as 'one off' events. If they are to have a sustained, positive impact on the political, social and economic development of the country, they must be seen as embedded in an entire electoral cycle and as part of a much broader process of democratisation. Otherwise local actors will learn to manipulate election days and democracy will be set back as processes become repeatedly more flawed or do not improve.

Effective election support means taking a long-term perspective, because many of the most important determinants of an election's outcome take place in the years before it occurs. For example, institutionalising democratic practices in political parties, or professionalizing and regulating the media, are reform processes that require patient support over many years to yield real benefits.

Development partners need to extend their period of commitment to at least ten years after the first elections in a post conflict society. This will help to eliminate the cycle of feast and famine that plagues such countries' electoral efforts and fuels unnecessary instability. For example, in Pakistan, at each election, almost 500,000 people were trained as polling staff for the 2007 elections, but none were retained to act in future because they belong to different government departments.

> Long-standing relationships between the various elections stakeholders (including donors) also bring benefits in terms of knowledge, trust and confidence, which can facilitate flexibility and dialogue in potentially difficult processes.

Nevertheless, long term commitment does not preclude development partners from pulling the plug on support to elections if the electoral process is clearly illegitimate. In certain contexts, donor countries may need to step away to preserve their own integrity and that of domestic monitors and indeed of the democratic process. In others, where governance appears to be deteriorating and where the democratic space is shrinking (such as DRC), there may be a case for the international community continuing with support to the institutions of democratic governance in order to preserve the neutrality and integrity of the nation's political and legal framework. This decision needs to be made on a case by case basis.

The international community needs to take a wide view of the range of processes and stakeholders which contribute to democratic outcomes, beyond the election commissions alone. Just as period of commitment is critical to achieving democratic outcomes, breadth of support is also fundamental. Election support alone is too narrow to achieve good electoral outcomes: the wider electoral landscape reveals many institutions that underpin democratisation, and there is a growing recognition that democracy in a country may well be better advanced through measures that lie outside of the electoral system proper. For example, in Nigeria, this would include deepening support to the media, more emphasis on civic and political (rather than voter) education, working with the courts and legal profession and adopting a political economy analysis ('Drivers of Change') approach.

Focusing on the links between stakeholders is also important. Increasingly, 'deepening democracy' programmes are being designed and supported by donors seeking to promote multi-stakeholder alliances to achieve reform, based on the recognition that social and political change occurs through the joint action of reformers 'on the inside' working with activists 'on the outside'[13]. Beyond the governmental electoral management bodies, these actors include parliaments, civil society organisations, media, political parties, judiciary and the security sector.

Donor support for parliamentary reform, but even more for technical backstopping of MPs, is vital to the effective development of legislative oversight. In all of the studies undertaken, it is clear that MPs receive few electoral rewards for paying attention to legislation; executive accountability; and the public interest more generally. Yet in many countries, a few MPs did care about these matters and often enabled their Parliaments to be more effective at times than the general political culture would predict.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a critical role in the entire electoral process. Their ability to foster voice and participation, to offer citizens a say in decisions and to enhance pluralism[14] provide a broader 'backdrop' to their contributions to the electoral process. Civic and voter education in particular is often conducted by different types of civil society organisation (international, national and local level organisations), and requires long-term support stretching around the electoral cycle. Equally, domestic election observation (see section vii), including vital activities such as parallel vote tabulation, is a key role for local CSOs. An organised, capable and independent civil society can contribute enormously to ensuring that accountability mechanisms – including elections – function properly, providing information to citizens and holding governments and political parties to account.

The international community needs to take a wide view of the range of processes and stakeholders which contribute to democratic outcomes, beyond the election commissions alone.

[13] Institute of Development Studies In Focus Policy Briefing Issue 5 Oct 2008
[14] Ibid.

Box 10:	Civil society in Nigeria: on the front line of democracy

Nigeria has a very active and diverse civil society, which includes a number of impressive organizations dedicated to improving Nigerian democracy. However, many of these CSOs are largely dependent on external donors for financial support. This means that donor funding focused on elections, rather than the full electoral cycle, is highly disruptive of their operations leading to dramatic ramping up and down of organisational activities. Fortunately, the many faith-based CSOs which play a critical role in this work have a more stable financial base.

Democratization CSOs in Nigeria are particularly important because it has been shown that elections generally are not 'free and fair'. Members of these CSOs sometimes literally risk their lives in combating electoral abuses at the polls. It is therefore especially important that international observers and members of the international community more broadly back-up their financial support with moral and political support for the work and findings of these organisations, even when this means accepting and endorsing a negative report of the elections.

(Taken from elections case study by Egwu et al 2008)

The media's role is also critical: where quality, multi-lingual but national radio has been supported (as it was in the DRC), it has been central to the democratic process. For example, the international community's Radio OKAPI platform has been critical for informed discussion in the DRC's political space. Likewise, the BBC World Service Trust Sanglap programme in Bangladesh is estimated to have reached 18- 21 million citizens in the pre-election debates.

In principle, political parties play a central role within well-functioning democracies, aggregating and representing citizens' interests and formulating policy agendas that can respond to citizens' concerns. They should be a crucial interlocutor between citizens and the state. In practice, in many countries – especially developing countries – political parties are weak and disconnected from the policy process, and struggle to connect with or represent citizens and their interests.

Although political party support has come a long way in recent years, there are some fundamental challenges to achieving impact in this area of intervention. Political party support includes areas such as codes of conduct; party programmes; parties' capacity to monitor elections and to appeal against violations or violence, etc. However, support has not always been tailored to context and there has been inadequate evaluation and learning, which means that the evidence base about what works in a particular sort of context is largely absent. Transforming political parties away from their

deeper deficiencies—their over-centralized leadership structures, non-transparent financing, lack of ideological coherence, etc – is probably only achievable when local incentives change.

An independent, professionally competent judiciary which is capable of making rapid decisions on electoral disputes is ultimately the most important legal support for democracy. The absence of a genuinely independent and timely judicial process can be a significant factor contributing to post election violence as was evident in the disputed Kenya elections and to a lesser extent in the DRC. The capacity to deal with election-related grievances is central to people's perception of legitimacy of elections. In Pakistan, the fairness of the election was marred by the fact that during the Emergency, many judges were removed by an executive order, which not only damaged public confidence in the independence of the judiciary, but also undermined their role in election administration and election adjudication.

The security services (police and army) also play a critical role in ensuring that elections offer genuine alternatives to violence in the resolution and management of societal conflicts. Otherwise the temptation to cheat and use coercion to achieve the desired outcome escalates and may even precipitate violence. In the DRC and Sierra Leone international players were central to the achievement of security services that deterred electoral violence. In Kenya, although the army insisted on remaining neutral (in part due to the experience it had gained in international peace keeping missions), police performance was deficient.

> Long-term security sector reforms that encourage political independence, accountability and effectiveness are ideal, but very difficult to achieve.

Box 11:	Successful support to the security sector in Sierra Leone

Getting long-term donor support for security helps underpin successful elections in post-conflict contexts. A number of factors were identified as having played an important role in the successful Sierra Leone election story:

- security support has been clear, long-term and consistent (unlike in Liberia where the assistance was not long term);

- Sierra Leone is a country where relationships are of paramount importance. Within this context, the strong acceptance of international community engagement by Sierra Leoneans stakeholders encompasses assistance for the security sector;

- assistance started 2 years before the elections.

(Taken from elections case study by Leonard, Pitso et al 2008)

(vi) Recognise limitations of development partners' role in elections support

If a government is determined not to allow independent administration of an election, external aid for the election management process is unlikely to change that. Whilst acknowledging that donor assistance has been fundamental to the holding of first-time elections in highly difficult post-conflict circumstances in Africa, Asia and elsewhere, it is important to recognise that the ability of the international community to leverage positive change may be limited and dependent on a much wider and deeper political context than elections alone (e.g. entrenched patterns of clientelism and patronage politics). In such contexts, assistance usually cannot fundamentally change the political handling of the election management process. These limitations are evident in case studies such as Nigeria, which is not donor dependent and has a strong sense of its own sovereignty, as well as in Bangladesh, where, despite playing an influential role in how an election is conducted, DPs' real political traction is nevertheless fairly constrained.

Some states that hold regular free and fair elections do not seem to undergo a deepening of democracy. Carothers (2008) argues that this is often due to the weakness of the accountability function – in other words, the failure to eject poorly performing power holders. The reason for this weakness varies. For example, in contexts where citizens base their votes on things other than government performance – traditional loyalty ties, for example – the feedback mechanism of elections is limited.

In addition, some of the main areas of democratic weakness in fragile states are not directly touched by the elections and therefore can persist despite the holding of regular elections. Chronic state weakness for example, a defining characteristic of fragile states, has many causes that are not addressed by the mere fact of holding elections, such as a lack of state revenue to finance an effective state. A weak rule of law, also a characteristic of fragile states, is usually also rooted in causes that are little affected by the holding of elections. Equally, where political parties are weak, top-down and ideologically incoherent, they constitute poor vehicles for representing citizen interests.

Even in apparently technical areas such as electoral system design, political interests run deep. Although extensive, sophisticated knowledge has been accumulated about the effects of different electoral systems on political developments in a wide variety of contexts (for example, the positive and negative effects of first past the post versus proportional representation for different outcomes), ultimately it is likely to be local political actors battling for their own gains that decide on such matters. Moreover, once a transitional country has developed its own electoral system, modifying that system becomes very difficult due to entrenched interests[15]. The constitutional framework and one electoral system usually have at least as much (if not more) influence over who will wield power after an election as issues connected to the conduct of the election itself. In the light of this, it is important to set realistic objectives and accept the limitations of what DPs can do.

> Setting targets for incremental change, rather than seeking to transform the political settlement overnight, makes it easier to achieve objectives and get political buy-in.

[15] Carothers 2008
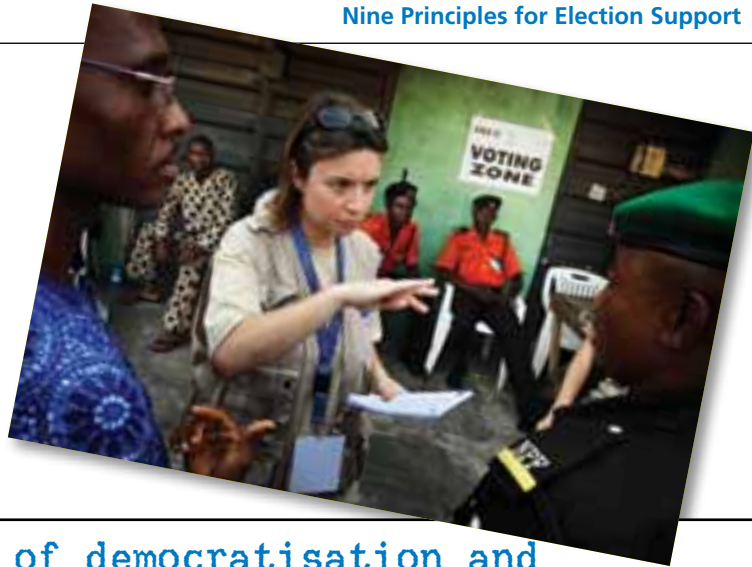
In the interests of democratisation and development, international observers should be consistent in their use of international standards to judge local practice.

(vii) Support election observation

Domestic non-partisan election monitoring groups, which are usually supported by international aid providers, can add significant depth to an election observation effort. They have the ability to field many more observers than international groups, and their observers usually have a much greater knowledge of the local scene. In some of the case study countries, domestic observers were able to reach areas where international monitors were not. Domestic election monitoring efforts also work directly within the domestic political life of the country, and thus sometimes provoke greater attention and debate. However, domestic monitoring is often constrained by limited capacity and independence.

International election observation has evolved greatly over the last twenty years. Observation missions have become sophisticated, long-term, and multi-faceted enterprises that span electoral processes from their origins through to post-election matters. Such missions consist of multiple visits to the country throughout the process, and periodic reporting on progress along the way. There is now an experienced cadre of people who have participated in such missions and bring extensive knowledge to the task. However, there is still considerable room for improvement. In Pakistan, for example, although the domestic observation effort was commendable and stood up well to comparison with international best practice, the international observer effort was not linked up to it. International observers concentrated on activities on and around Election Day, and did not look at wider electoral processes, including voter registration, filing of nomination papers and compliance with the code of conduct. Their outreach was constrained by local security concerns. Long-term and broadly mandated observation (able to look at any aspect of the political or legal environment impacting on elections) is most effective.

Coherence with national monitoring is also important. The common profusion of international monitoring efforts in any one election, which can often result in inconsistent or even contradictory

The international community needs to decide on responses to flawed elections not just on the basis of informal assessments of the outcome – whether the recorded vote reflects 'the will of the people' – but also on the quality of the whole electoral process.

judgements being issued on the same election, risks undermining the influence of the international monitoring effort and can be exploited by local political actors to their advantage. For example, election observation by some Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) has often been used as a political tool to counter the critical judgements issued by OSCE election observation missions.

The practice of attempting to interpret 'the will of the people' in the event of a flawed election process is identified as a cause for concern. A longer-term approach to election observation is vital for this. Accountability and responsiveness derive from the quality of the whole process, which should allow citizens and political parties to participate in elections, to have choices and to understand what the choices offer and to vote for their preferred candidate freely and fairly through credible processes.

In the interests of democratisation and development, international observers should be consistent in their use of international standards to judge local practice. It is better for potential international observers to refuse to participate at all than to be complicit in a report that tells less than the full truth about an election or is overly subtle in stating it. As was evident in Nigeria, locals who have risked their lives trying to deliver democracy can feel deeply betrayed when international support is weak or inconsistent. In order to increase the credibility of the international response to elections, the international community needs to develop a neutral, standards-based approach and response to elections, and be more consistent about following up recommendations in elections reports.

Box 12:	**Taking a stand: Withdrawing international monitors in Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, the decision to withdraw international monitors just before the 2007 election marked an important watershed, signalling that the international community would be unlikely to endorse the legitimacy of the party that won the election. Indeed, the EU's own announcement about withdrawal was followed immediately the next day by the declaration of a State of Emergency, and the subsequent installation of a military-backed 'caretaker' Government. Once that was formed, the diplomatic community became actively engaged.

(Taken from elections case study by Duncan et al 2009)

African regional electoral NGOs also play an important role. The Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA), for example, has demonstrated objectivity, impartiality and professionalism in election observation. This has led, in extreme cases, to refusal to invite them to observe elections (e.g. Zimbabwe since 2005). While the assessments of elections by NGOs may be dismissed by some host countries because of their lack of official recognition, NGO declarations and reports are in reality taken seriously by governments and EMBs in the host countries because of their technical nature. This is demonstrated by invitations received from EMBs to attend post-election evaluations in several countries.

Box 13:	Observation by African regional bodies

The Africa Union (AU) and sub-regional organisations have an increasing interest in election monitoring. Across the African region, there is growing commitment towards democratisation of governance systems and a number of continental declarations of intent. The AU in particular is widely recognised as having a good normative framework and strong legitimacy that provide them with particular leverage. It has established its own Democracy Electoral Assistance Unit, with a Fund to which a number of international donors have provided assistance.

The involvement of African regional organisations in the electoral field is nearly exclusively limited to election observation. There is generally more funding available for election observation, an activity which ensures strong visibility of the deploying organisation and its sponsor, than for electoral assistance. The latter is often a low key activity, which yet has the benefit of achieving more sustainable impact in the management of elections on the continent.

The main intervention that the international community can make in support of African regional organisations is to provide longer term funding and capacity building. The few international institutions working in the field of elections are given funds to conduct specific activities around the election period, like election observation, and are often only given this financial support close to election day itself. There is little effort to build their capacity to become steadily available resource institutions for their regions in the area of electoral assistance. Human, financial and technological resource constraints are key challenges. Support to African inter-governmental bodies in election observation would be of limited importance if they do not transform themselves to become bolder in their assessments. For example, the AU election observation missions have almost invariably declared all elections observed to be 'free and fair', with one or two exceptions.

(viii) Support women's political participation

Programmes encouraging the participation of women in electoral offices are crucial to ensure greater gender equality in both local and national elections. A range of initiatives designed to level the playing fields for women aspirants includes networks linking civil and political society; cross-party caucuses; capacity building opportunities; civic and voter education; access to information; campaigns; support for women's movements; parliamentary strengthening activities; political party support; and

electoral reforms. Patriarchal cultures, lack of access to funding, intra-party discrimination and intimidation from political parties and chiefs are amongst the challenges faced by many women candidates.

Consistent and on-going support to the women in politics agenda is critical to sustain momentum and advances made. These programmes need to be funded during non-election years, and donors need to ensure that once elected, women are still able to access support to overcome prejudices and other disadvantages. Unfortunately, few electoral programmes provide such on-going support. The case of Pakistan (see Box 14 below) illustrates how progress can be undermined if support vanishes.

Box 14:	Losing momentum: donor support for women in Pakistani politics

In Pakistan, although donors had prioritised training women to contest local elections in 2001 and 2005, support to women candidates took a back seat in the national and provincial elections in 2008. The only support they received from the international community was through a small Asia Foundation initiative whereby a local research organisation, The Researchers, customised an electoral observation module with a gender lens in women-contested constituencies. A voter education campaign led by FAFEN; The Pakistan Coalition for a Free and Fair Election (PACFREL); and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan also focused on the importance of women in political decision-making. This support, not surprisingly, was insufficient to address the challenges most women face, especially those women without family connections, in getting nominated and then elected in open seats.

(Taken from elections case study by Waseem et al 2008)

Development partners need to address both formal and informal institutions need to be addressed in order to tackle the problem of gender inequality and discrimination within this arena. Even where legislation is progressive and reserved quota seats available to women, entrenched interests and cultural discrimination often mean that battling exclusion remains a significant challenge which needs to be tackled by long-term, multi-level approaches. In Nigeria, for example, political life continues to be characterized by the exclusion of ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups including women, youth and disabled people. Despite various efforts to engage the executive and political parties in making the political terrain friendlier to women, the percentage of women office-holders at the national, state and local government levels following the 2007 elections is just 6%. Ensuring that these few women have the skills and knowledge to function effectively is fundamentally important to creating the 'role model' effect and beginning to break down prejudices.

(ix) Follow principles of, harmonisation, alignment and ownership

Broad, consensual networks are central to the effectiveness of international support for good governance. Recognising the value of the electoral cycle approach, it is obvious that providing support in a predictable and long-term way, to a wide variety of elections actors, inevitably demands excellent coordination between DPs. The case studies show that networking between internationals has generally been quite effective and broad-based. Where it has been constrained, it has impacted negatively on the process.

Basket funds of some kind for pooling donor support are useful mechanisms for providing harmonised support for elections. These tools have worked well in many contexts; even for DPs who do not contribute towards pooled funding mechanisms this model can provide a helpful hub around which to organise their own support. However, in practice, basket fund management has proven difficult to get right, for example, problems highlighted in the management of basket funds in the case studies include a lack of capacity building to local institutions (UNDP basket fund mangement in Sierra Leone), and failure to represent concerns with government (UNDP in Kenya). The case studies also highlight that in some instances multi-donor basket funds have suffered from accountability being oriented towards donor countries rather than government. It may be helpful to look at other country examples where innovative management arrangements have been developed for electoral commission basket funds (eg Rwanda).

Donors need to address both formal and informal institutions in order to tackle the problem of gender inequality and discrimination within this arena

Box 15:   Snapshots of donor networking around elections

In **Bangladesh**, international support for the election followed good practice in making aid effective. First, external partners respected local Bangladeshi ownership of the process, and this ownership was broader than just government. The leadership and independence of the Election Commission, and the combined efforts of DPs to support their work and priorities, were key. Second, in important respects the efforts of DPs were aligned with, and built up, local systems (the Election Commission, the non-governmental Elections Working Group, and private broadcasters), although government procurement systems were not generally employed. Third, donor harmonisation, primarily through the Local Consultative Group, worked well, because of both the high-level determination that it was to succeed, and the role played by a few key individuals. Further, it proved possible through the harmonisation arrangements between DPs to reconcile different donor procedures, notably that some but not all, were willing to contribute to pooled funds, while others separately parallel-funded activities that nevertheless contributed to a coherent whole. Differences could thus be recognised and accommodated without leading to fragmentation of effort. The strength of the donor harmonisation arrangements, and the authority to take decisions in the LCG, go a long way towards explaining the success of the interventions.

In **Sierra Leone**, the governance of election support was inclusive. There was a Steering Committee for the UNDP basket project, composed of its donors and the Government of Sierra Leone. There was also a Stakeholders Meeting for all the actors concerned with the elections. Thus the diplomatic community in Sierra Leone was tightly networked around the elections, no doubt facilitated by the small number of accredited missions resident in the country and the consciousness by all of the dangers that post-conflict elections can pose. The breadth and depth of this networking was apparent when the leadership of the incumbent party had to be persuaded that it had lost the 2007 elections and needed to surrender the presidency to the opposition. Highly unusually, even the Ambassadors of the People's Republic of China and Iran, which did not provide electoral support, joined in the effort at persuasion.

(Taken from elections case studies by Duncan et al 2009; Leonard, Pitso et al 2009; Waseem et al 2008)

Where possible, alignment to national/ local structures and systems is important for national ownership and sustainability. DPs need to consider coordinating their support in such a way that national actors (for example, election commissions) are given a lead role and can drive the reform process where relevant. Based on local capacity and an assessment of the political economy, support needs to be designed to build capacity and to empower local actors. Thus, for example, the diplomatic effort in Pakistan was critical to ensuring that the elections focused on parties and meaningful transfer to civilian rule, enabling Pakistanis to monitor the election effectively themselves and ensuring that the Electoral Commission functioned at its best.

However, alignment with national structures and systems should not prevent the international community from speaking independently and maintaining firm political pressure when required. Indeed, the international community's role as supporter and monitor of elections requires that it maintain this objectivity, and that alignment should be clearly distinguished from acquiescence. Box 16 on Sierra Leone provides an excellent example of this. There is also particular value in bilateral donors retaining a channel for political dialogue separate from a (typically UNDP-led) basket fund.

Box 16:	Sierra Leone: Maintaining standards

Writing in the Journal of Modern African Studies, Jimmy Kandeh sums up the importance of the international community's role in the 2007 Sierra Leone elections as follows:

> *By sandbagging the SLPP [Sierra Leone People's Party] into reluctantly conforming to liberal rules and procedures of electoral competition, the international community played a critical role in ensuring a popular outcome to the 2007 elections. The international community, however, did not determine or pick winners in these elections; they simply made it counter-productive for the SLPP leadership to subvert the wishes of the electorate by rigging them. It is in this sense that donor assistance can contribute to democratisation in societies emerging from wars caused by predatory governance.*

(Taken from elections case study by Leonard, Pitso et al 2008)

Understanding incentives can help efforts to harmonise and align initiatives.The 2008 Paris Declaration progress report found that the central explanation internationally for why so often good practice in aid management is not followed is that the incentives affecting the behaviour of the main parties are not conducive to it. Within donor agencies, this includes shifting incentives towards results, embedding common values, deepening responsibilities and strengthening partnerships. The Bangladesh case study is therefore quite unusual because donors' developmental, political and security concerns coincided. Incentives were strongly and closely aligned between the DPs and key Bangladeshi stakeholders, including the 'caretaker' Government, their military backers, and civil society. Sustaining these common incentives may prove challenging, however.

Finally, international 'best practices,' especially for electoral systems, should not pre-empt local solutions that respond to the most urgent problems. Elections and the institutions that support them serve different functions in different countries and at different stages of their political development (for example, the driving motivation for elections in DRC was not democracy but peace). This requires that the international community respect local ownership and processes, as long as these conform to agreed standards including human rights.

Conclusion

This brief has highlighted numerous lessons embedded in the case studies and reviews conducted as part of this process. These studies demonstrate that, whilst significant progress has been made towards a more nuanced, harmonised and politically-informed approach to elections by the international community, a number of obstacles continue to impede more effective international support to elections. These obstacles include:

- The difficulties of engaging in a politically-informed way (eg competing foreign policy priorities, unresponsive governments, responding to the findings of political economy analysis etc);

- Policy development gaps (eg on the need to systematise and embed the electoral cycle approach);

- Programme management issues (eg with regard to basket funds).

The specific country and local circumstances in which development partners operationalise their support for elections will always be critical to informing choices and programme designs. Nevertheless, we need to develop common standards that will help to inform an appropriate response in these many different contexts.

Incorporating the lessons identified here into the work of the international community on elections support would constitute important progress. For example, developing a set of internationally-endorsed principles – along the lines of the OECD DAC 'Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States' – could provide a useful framework for informing this kind of politically-integrated approach to elections support, an element that would complement existing technical good practice as developed by UNDP, EC, USAID etc.

Another step might include improved, long-term planning by the international community of support for specific upcoming elections, and enhanced international capacity to provide political and technical support to elections. An international commitment to electoral support financing would constitute a good counterweight to the short-term approaches adopted by many DPs that may result from a lack of domestic political will to support long-term activity.

The specific country and local circumstances in which donors operationalise their support for elections will always be critical to informing choices and programme designs.

Papers commissioned by DFID as part of its elections review work

Carothers, T (2008) Current Questions about the Roles of Elections and International Elections Assistance in Developing and Transitional Countries

Duncan, A, Loughhead, S and Eckstein, J (2009) Good election, bad politics: a case study of elections and the role of the international community in Bangladesh

Egwu, S, Leonard, DK, Matlosa, K, Smith, M (2008) Nigerian Elections since 1999 and the Future of Donor Support

Kadima, D and Leonard, DK et al (2009) Elections and Democratisation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Kadima, D and Matlosa, K (2009) The Roles of Regional Organisations in Elections in Africa

Leonard, DK and Odhiambo Owuor, F et al (2009) The Political and Institutional Context of the 2007 Kenya Elections and Reforms Needed for the Future

Leonard, DK, Pitso, T et al (2008) The Political Economy of Democratisation in Sierra Leone: Reflections on the Elections of 2007 and 2008

Leonard, DK and Schmidt, A (2009) Elections and Conflict in Africa: How Might Donors Respond?

Owen, P, Slavu, C and Hachhethu, K (2008) Nepal: A Case Study on Elections and the Role of the International Community

Waseem, M, Yazdani, F and Loughhead, S (2008) Elections in Pakistan: The Role of The UK and the International Community 2000-2008

Wilson, R, Sharma, B et al, (2008) Review of UK Electoral Assistance in the Context of Lessons Emerging from Best Practice in International Experience

Other references

Al-Momani, M.H. 2003. Financial Transfer and Its Impact on the Level of Democracy: A Pooled Cross-Sectional Time Series Model. Ph.D. thesis, University of North Texas.

Anderson, C, Blais, A, Bowler, S, Donovan T and Listhaug, A (2005) Losers' consent: Elections and democratic legitimacy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Azpuru, D., Finkel, S., Pérez-Liñán, A., and Seligson, M.A. 2008. American Democracy Assistance, Patterns and Priorities. Journal of Democracy 91(2).

Carothers, T (2007) 'How Democracies Emerge: The Sequencing Fallacy', Journal of Democracy 18 (1),18-21.

Diamond, L (2008) "Supporting Democracy: Refashioning U.S. Global Strategy to Advance Freedom," prepared for the CSIS Project on "Democracy Promotion in U.S. Grand Strategy".

Elbadawi, I & N Sambanis. (2000). 'Why Are There So Many Civil Wars in Africa? Understanding and Preventing Violent Conflict'. Journal of African Economies 93.

Finkel, S.E., Pérez-Liñán, A., and Seligson, M.A. 2007. The Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building, 1990-2003. World Politics 59(3):404-439.

Hubli, K. Scott and Martin Schmidt (2005) Approaches to Parliamentary Strengthening: A Review of Sida's Support to Parliaments, Sida Evaluation.

Hudson, A and Wren, C (2007) Parliamentary strengthening in developing countries. ODI report commissioned by DFID.

Kalyvitis, S.C., and Vlachaki, I. 2007. Democracy Assistance and the Democratization of Recipients. Available at: http://ssrn.com/abstract=888262.

Kumar, K and Ottaway M (1998) 'General conclusions and priorities for policy research', in K Kumar (ed) Post-conflict elections. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

What is Development?
Why is the UK Government involved?
What is DFID?

International development is about helping people fight poverty.

This means people in rich and poor countries working together to settle conflicts, increase opportunities for trade, tackle climate change, improve people's health and their chance to get an education.

It means helping governments in developing countries put their own plans into action. It means agreeing debt relief, working with international institutions that co-ordinate support, and working with non-government organisations and charities to give communities a chance to find their own ways out of poverty.

Getting rid of poverty will make for a better world for everybody.

Nearly a billion people, one in 6 of the world's population, live in extreme poverty. This means they live on less than $1 a day. Ten million children die before their fifth birthday, most of them from preventable diseases. More than 113 million children in developing countries do not go to school.

In a world of growing wealth, such levels of human suffering and wasted potential are not only morally wrong, they are also against our own interests.

We are closer to people in developing countries than ever before. We trade more and more with people in poor countries, and many of the problems which affect us   conflict, international crime, refugees, the trade in illegal drugs and the spread of diseases   are caused or made worse by poverty in developing countries.

In the last 10 years Britain has more than trebled its spending on aid to nearly £7 billion a year. We are now the fourth largest donor in the world.

DFID, the Department for International Development, is the part of the UK Government that manages Britain's aid to poor countries and works to get rid of extreme poverty.

We work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals   a set of targets agreed by the United Nations to halve global poverty by 2015.

DFID works in partnership with governments, civil society, the private sector and others. It also works with multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, United Nations agencies and the European Commission.

DFID works directly in over 150 countries worldwide. Its headquarters are in London and East Kilbride, near Glasgow.